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J CAP & GOWN VS CLOAK & DAGGER AT THE CIA  
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WASHINGTON

any A Robert Michael Gates, director-nominee of the CIA, may chart a new, quieter, non-Rambo era for the 40-year-old intelligence agency.

Former colleagues and others commend the prematurely silver-haired Gates as a cautious, professional analyst who has never in his 20 years of intelligence work been engaged in espionage abroad or directly involved in covert or clandestine operations.

Until now, he has avoided publicity. So much so, that when President Reagan last Monday nominated him to succeed the seriously ailing William Casey, Gates's exact age and family status were not readily available.

Casey, 73, resigned that day because of the uncertain and prolonged convalescence he faced following surgery Dec. 18 for a cancerous brain tumor.

Reporters have not been able to interview Gates since his nomination. But much of his professional and personal philosophy and demeanor will undoubtedly emerge when he undergoes Senate confirmation hearings Feb. 17 and later questioning before Senate and House intelligence committees and special panels.

They will be asking him what, if any, was his role in or knowledge of the secret sale of U.S. arms to Iran, their possible connection with the fate of American hostages, and the reported diversion of profits from the sales to the Contras fighting Marxist Nicaraguan forces.

Gates is 43, and when confirmed -- as is expected -- will be the youngest man to head the agency.

Born in Wichita, Kan., he went directly into the CIA as an analyst in 1966 after graduating from the College of William and Mary at Williamsburg, Va. He also holds a master's degree in history from Indiana University and a doctorate in Russian and Soviet history from Georgetown University. He is married and has two children.

"He has never been a spy abroad, out in the field," an intelligence source said. "He is a pure and outstanding analyst in distilling the mass of raw information that pours in from all over the world and telling those with a clearance to know what it means."

Gates also served for five years on the National Security Council during the Nixon, Ford and Carter administrations.

Like Casey, who under Reagan became the first intelligence chief with Cabinet rank, Gates will wear two hats -- director of CIA and director of central intelligence. The latter rank elevates Gates to overall charge of "the intelligence community," which includes the vast National Security Agency and other government intelligence organizations, military and civilian.

What appears to be emerging with the Gates nomination is a shifting of emphasis from much-criticized, and sometimes bungled, covert and clandestine operations, to the field of analysis of intelligence and projection or timely anticipation of events of national or international significance.

A William Colby, an intrepid saboteur and spy for the Office of Strategic Services in World War II when he parachuted into German-occupied Norway, rose through the ranks of the post-war CIA, including clandestine service abroad, to become director from 1973 to 1976.

Now a partner in a Washington law firm, the 67-year-old intelligence veteran was asked what he thought of Gates's nomination.

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"I think it's excellent," he said. "He's a very good man. An interesting aspect is the recognition that the analytical function has become a central part of intelligence. That was the original objective."

Richard Helms, also an OSS veteran and CIA Director from 1966 to 1973 before serving as ambassador to Iran, said, "This is a good appointment."

"Bob Gates has demonstrated that he is highly intelligent, a hard worker, conversant with the analytical and estimation side of the agency," Helms said.

"He has had useful experience on the National Security Council. He is the first director of central intelligence who came up on the analytical side. But that is probably a point in his favor since that is the purpose for which the CIA was formed by the National Security Act of 1947. The emphasis of the agency should be on analysis and estimating."

David Attlee Phillips, who spent 26 years with the CIA -- mostly in the clandestine branch -- and retired in 1975, said, "I think that the people who have been in the covert action business are quite convinced that this appointment will be a diminution of that kind of clandestine activity."

"Most of us who have participated, and all who have not, think it's a good idea for the time being," he said. "A couple of years of relative quiet at the headquarters of CIA would be a good thing for all concerned. Because that would mean that, without noise, the agency could get back on track to its principal directive -- which is the collection of intelligence."

After his retirement, Phillips formed the Association of Retired Intelligence Officers now numbering some 3,500 members. He recalled that Gates, in a previously unreported address to an October 1985 convention of the society, listed the 10 most important trends for the future of the intelligence community.

Some of the points Gates made take on added significance in view of the Iran-Contra scandal and who knew what and when. They included:

- "The coming revolution in the way intelligence is communicated to policy makers."

- "A revolution in relations with Congress." Congress, with the vast amount of information being provided, "will be able to ask tougher questions" and play a larger and more effective role in foreign policy and become more of a partner to the agency.

- Use by the executive branch of intelligence for public education. This began with the release in 1977 of the agency's detailed analysis of the performance and prospects of the Soviet economy and was subsequently expanded to include up-to-the-minute analyses that required special declassification. In 1985, the agency began an annual public estimate of Soviet strategic forces as part of administration efforts to get support for defense policies from the media and Congress.

- A dramatic increase in the diversity of subjects the intelligence community is required to address and the increasing growth and diversity of the users of intelligence.

- Intelligence becoming steadily more central to the foreign policy process and the only arm of government looking to the future.

Walter Pforzheimer, former CIA legislative counsel and assistant general counsel, said of Gates, "The president couldn't have made a finer appointment. I had thought wouldn't it be nice if we had a good quiet professional at the head of it (the CIA.)"

"Gates is basically a quiet professional. He is also the first director of central intelligence from inside the agency who hadn't come out of the OSS in World War II. He worked up through the agency. You will occasionally find an old timer who mutters that he (Gates) never had any clandestine experience. But Gates has been very supportive of the clandestine services. I hope he will last through the next administration."